

In A World So Cold

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Summary: To find and destroy the Borealis, maybe Gordon and Alyx need someone who knows the ups and downs of Aperture... And the Combine might just have the same idea. In a world she doesn't understand, does this make Chell the Combine's #1 target?

In A World So Cold

Freedom.

Somehow Chell didn't quite believe she was free. It was hard to believe that after the " at least what she presumed was " years of being cooped up inside Aperture Science, trapped in status, completing possibly life-threatening tests and avoiding a psychopathic, murderous AI, it seemed all too easy that she was let out quite so simply.

'...Things have changed since the last time you left the building... What's going on out there will make you wish you were back in here...'

Of course, at the time, Chell ignored the statement, concentrating only on saving her life and bringing down GLaDOS who'd made being a part of Aperture Science a living nightmare.

'...I have an infinite capacity for knowledge, and even I'm not sure what's going on outside...'

However, after spending the last two days wandering aimlessly in the outside world " and finding nothing but abandoned and destroyed buildings, often smothered in dry blood - and sometimes littered with bodies, some of which seemed to have been somewhat mutated and so she had decided to avoid them - she was starting to wonder if GLaDOS really had been telling the truth about life outside of Aperture.

So far, it didn't seem like the outside world was very promising. She had found no signs of life " even after reaching a forest that

looked like it was once inhabited by plenty of people. She soon came across an old road, and began to follow it along. Hoping that it'd lead her somewhere " anywhere that she could see another live, human face. Even the Companion Cube was no longer with her. As much as she somehow managed to enjoy the company of the silent, partly burnt cube, she had to leave it behind a few hours before she reached the road, lacking the strength to carry it any further. She hadn't eaten for who-knew how long. Somehow, being in Aperture Science seemed to cut out the need for food or drink while testing - but now she was out of the facility, the lack of nutrients were beginning to take it's toll on her.

'...All I know is that I'm the only thing standing between us, and Them... Well... I was...'

Chell spun suddenly on the spot, hearing what sounded like chatter through radios somewhere behind her. The voices sounded somewhat robotic, though not completely. Still, unless she was starting to imagine things, it was some form of life, and therefore she changed directions and began to cautiously head toward the noises.

It wasn't long before she spotted movement " what seemed like a squad of people came charging out of the trees in her direction. There were seven of them " four were dressed in black, and the other three in grey. They all seemed to be wearing some form of what could only be described as an odd 'gas-mask', somehow leaving her to wonder if they were actually human or not.

And they were all carrying weapons.

The first thing that came to Chell's mind was that she didn't have anything to protect herself with. Hand-to-hand combat was never her type of thing " though she doubted she'd be any good with a firearm either. She had been a lot better at simply thinking her way out of situations, especially with a portal gun. But she now had nothing. GLaDOS had taken back the portal gun while she had been unconscious - just before she had been let out of Aperture, even though she'd been able to keep the long-fall boots. Mentally cursing the psychotic AI, she raised her hands in a hope that the squad would see her silent version of 'I come in peace' and hold their fire.

"Get down!" a more human voice called out from somewhere behind her, and seeing the squad raise their weapons in her direction, she did as she was told and hit the deck. She instantly covered her head with her arms as bullets shot by overhead. Some robotic, gargled screams later and Chell glanced up to find the squad lying motionless on the ground in front of her. Carefully, she rose to her feet, dusting herself off before turning to face the humans that were now approaching her.

There were four of them " they all looked battered and bruised, like they were fighting a war - and she was even beginning to wonder if that was what was going on. She noticed that one was holding his shoulder, looking as if he'd either been shot, or had a bullet graze his arm. From plenty of turret encounters, Chell knew that it wasn't a pleasant experience.

"You're new around here, aren't ya?" one of the group asked her as he stopped in front of her, weapon pointed towards the floor in a non-threatening way. He appeared to be the leader of the group, the

others falling behind slightly to wait for commands from him. Chell frowned a little to his question, nodding silently.

"Why the hell did you surrender to those ass-holes though, surely you'd know what would happen?" he asked after her nod, glancing past her and towards the bodies lying on the ground. She followed his gaze towards them before turning back to face him, shrugging and shaking her head a little. She wanted to tell him that she wasn't surrendering, just telling them that she meant no harm. After all, how was she to know that they'd react violently to her presence?

"...Really? You-" he paused slightly, rubbing the back of his neck in confusion, "Wow, you really are new. Do you even have any idea what's even going on around here?" Another shake of Chell's head left both him and the other three behind him all confused.

"Well... We better get you to White Forest then, and get someone to properly explain what you've been missing out on... How you've managed to miss the last twenty-three years I have no idea though..." he paused for a moment, as if thinking of what to say before he spoke out loud, "Are... Are you able to speak?" Chell opened her mouth to try and say something, but settled for shaking her head once again. She personally blamed the amount of times she'd been kept in stasis for her lack of speech, but in truth, she honestly didn't know the real reason. She wasn't exactly mute, she could speak, however, whenever she did it only brought a burning sensation to her vocal chords, and she could barely muster a few whispered words before falling back to her silent ways.

"Heh, mute huh? We know another one of those. A so-called 'Freeman'," he replied, frowning again as the name meant nothing to her. "Well... Anyway... I'm Luc, mind if I call you 'Lauren' 'till we can get you back to White Forest?" She shrugged a little and nodded to his request "€" Lauren wasn't a name she particularly liked, but it was better than not knowing when people were or weren't talking to you.

"Thanks... Now, we should head off before another squad of Combine notices us, I doubt we'd do too well against a couple of Hunters..." Luc said, giving her a small smile before turning and heading back in the direction of the base, the others following close by and keeping a sharp eye out for any hostile forces.

End
file.